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Volume 8, Number 1, December 1952

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1022982ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1022982ar>

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Publisher(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (print)

1703-8138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Jolicoeur, F. (1952). The Education of Labour in the United States. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 8(1), 118-124.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1022982ar>

Article abstract

In a general picture of the education of labour in the United States of which the evolution has followed that of American unionism, this study gives an idea of the conception that the American unions have of the education of labour and the methods they use to carry it out. The Author asserts that they attach much importance to the training of their members in union questions, but do not go any further except in particular cases. They have developed, however, techniques in adult education which could serve efficiently for a much wider formation.

The Education of Labour in the United States

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Labour education in the United States has taken the most complex forms and covers a very wide field. From primary schools to the technical formation of union officials and culture, nothing has escaped, at one time or another, the concern of the American unions. Everybody, it would seem, labour unions, employers, independent religious and secular associations, colleges, universities, have concerned themselves with the education of labour for the most varied reasons.

In this field, as in many others, the proper formula has not yet been found. Many experiments have been made, there have been many disappointments, some have given up, others have not yet dared to face the difficulties involved. But those union leaders who persist in including the education of labour in their programme, are at the same time those whose unions are the most active, the most disposed to fight and the most appreciated by the workers; the most democratic unions, those by which may be judged the authenticity and the value of a labour movement.

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History

The history of the education of labour in the United States has followed that of the evolution of American unionism. After having been inspired during a long period by the American Federation of Labor (A.F. of L.), it took on an entirely different aspect under the impetus of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (C.I.O.) founded in 1936. Today, it would seem to have found again its unity over all union divisions and to make new advances. To recognize its evolution along with that of unionism is probably a way of discovering that the education of labour is one of the essential aspects of a labour movement.

Union education, strictly speaking, which consists of teaching the workers the techniques that they need to fill union functions, only dates back about thirty years. It is the Workers Education Bureau, an independent organization founded in 1921, but immediately given official recognition by the A.F. of L., which was the real originator of this educational movement specifically designed for unionism.

But the free schooling established at the end of the 19th Century has not given all the results that were expected. The worker came out of primary school without practical preparation for the life ahead of him. The education received was incomplete and all directed towards more advanced studies that the workers had no way of undertaking. The concession made to the working-class by the establishment of free and compulsory education, lost its value as higher education became more and more indispensable in order to make a success in life and the primary school itself corresponded less and less with the immediate needs of the largest part of the population. The workers' movement lost confidence in the public school system.

It is a little from this situation that has sprung the movement for adult education in the United States. It was realized that it was necessary to complete, by evening classes, for example, or by correspondence courses, the education of those that life had taken too young. But the labour unions soon realized that they could not count on this new institution to aid them to attain their ends. The C.I.O. from its beginning, had contributed much to spread the idea that the education of labour should be done by the workers' movement. But the union sectors which separated themselves from the mother-federation in order to found a new workers' congress had, at first, many other things to do besides looking after education. It was urgent to carry on big organ-

ization campaigns in order to assure the life of the new movement. The nature itself of its organization on an industrial basis, and the sectors in which it worked, such as metallurgy, automotive industry, and mines, caused it to recruit mainly labourers and semi-qualified workers which gave it a very specific orientation. The extent of its vertical organization distinguished the C.I.O. from the A.F. of L. and brought it closer to the great mass of workers and, consequently, caused it to break several relations kept up by the old federation with the outside world.

Slowly, the most vigorous unions of the C.I.O. for example, the United Steelworkers of America, set up their own education department under the direction of one of their permanent employees. They organized such a service with the idea of furnishing most of their members the most possible reasons to belong to the C.I.O., and to break in to union techniques the negotiators, organizers, business agents and local union officers of which they had an urgent need to complete their effectives.

Conception of the Education of Labour

This is roughly, the difference in conception that existed between the A.F. of L. and the C.I.O. in regard to education of labour. The first understands the education of labour in its largest sense and leaves it to outside organizations to look after it. The second restricts the sense to strictly union training and wishes to depend only on its own forces for this training. But this difference in conception has a tendency to disappear to-day. The A.F. of L. has completely absorbed the Workers Education Bureau, and the C.I.O. in instituting on a national scale its own education and research division, has enlarged its conception of education of labour. The C.I.O. profited from the beginning from the more or less successful experiments of the A.F. of L. and the latter received a lesson in common sense from the C.I.O. who knew, first of all, how to train competent and efficient leaders and develop a necessary solidarity before giving a taste for culture which would risk being exclusively individualistic.

It must be said that certain free associations, in particular the American Labor Education Service, and some universities through their "Extension Departments" are working together to make unanimous the aims and methods in the education of Labour.

To-day, when an investigation of the activity of American unions on the question of education is made, it will be found that in practice it concerns itself almost exclusively with technical union training.

This concern not only appears in the programmes of study, but comes from a conception belonging to American unionism. The education of labour helps two kinds of relations: between the union and its members, and between the union and the community either local, regional, national or international. The education of labour is therefore solely a way to advance unionism, it is not an aim of unionism itself.

Present Realizations

It must be stated that it is still only the minority of the American unions that are really working to train their members. Many of them are practically not interested.

As we have already noted at the beginning, the most progressive unions, the most powerful ones, are those that have the most developed education services. Let us mention, among the C.I.O. unions: United Automobile Workers, who have a director of education and twenty-three regional representatives exclusively occupied in organizing education programmes, who publish a monthly bulletin concerning the technique of education and who hold a dozen specialized sessions of one or two weeks, every summer, all over the country. — Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, who have also a national director and fourteen regional directors, who edit their monthly educational bulletin and run a very popular book club. — United Packinghouse Workers of America, who hold each year many intensive sessions of two or three days, for the officers and departmental stewards. — United Steelworkers of America, who reach every year thousands of members, in about fifteen intensive sessions which each last a week. — Textile Workers' Union of America, who show considerable activity in the question of education and multiply the workers' institutions of all kinds, of which one of the most recent has consisted in bringing union leaders to Washington for four days to study on the spot government organization.

Among the unions of the A.F. of L. let us mention particularly: International Ladies Garment Workers' Union (I.L.G.W.U.) which is certainly the American labour federation which shows the most activity in the question of education. In addition to a national department of education, it includes in its ranks, eighty-five regional directors including about thirty on a full-time basis, who keep some four hundred

courses going, held each year in the local unions. But the biggest enterprise of the I.L.G.W.U., an unique experiment in the workers' movement to-day, is its Training Institute, a workers' college where the pupils put in a complete year and are then assured of permanent employment in the union. The programme includes theory and practical training in the field of action of the union itself. Among the other international unions of the A.F. of L., must be mentioned the intensive educational work of the International Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulphite & Paper Mill Workers and the International Brotherhood of Paper Makers as well as the United Textile Workers of America and Upholsterers' International Union of North America.

In addition to this activity, certainly the most important, there remains the work accomplished in the same field by the State Federations of Labour. These federations look after especially public relations, social services, good citizenship, in all its forms, etc.

Techniques

All these unions, councils and federations are trying to use to advantage the most modern methods of adult education. It may be said that the American labour movement excels in using training techniques. We might be even tempted to believe that this concern sometimes is given more importance than the aim itself of education of labour. Everything is used skilfully: sound films and stills, radio, recordings, plays in which two or three workers interpret a situation to be discussed by the group, workers' and union songs, quiz programmes, work shops, graphs, diagrams, posters and cartoons, all possible material for discussion. All this takes place in varied study meetings including the most popular methods of discussion, such as forums, symposiums, panels, debates, small group discussions. The education services of the federated unions and the great industrial unions which we mentioned before, furnish plentifully their locals with all the necessary material to keep going and render interesting an education programme.

The most widespread and popular type of meetings are the intensive sessions held especially during the summer over a week-end or two or three days, or for a whole week and occasionally two weeks. These sessions are called labour institutes or labour schools. These institutes are in the country, sometimes on the campus itself of a university, which helps with the session.

The Interest of Independent Organizations

The part played by the American universities in the education of labour is a subject that merits being treated separately as it is quite complex and has caused considerable discussion. The attitude of the labour unions to this particular activity of certain universities, is the same as towards outside organizations: suspicion on the part of some unions, a more open cooperation from some others. Among the universities who offer the best programmes of labour education there is Cornell University, in New York State, Rutgers University, in New Jersey, University of Wisconsin (which seems to be very popular with the workers), University of Illinois, University of Chicago, Harvard University, University of California. Some universities, a few only, make up programmes in close cooperation with the Labour unions at their request and for specialized sessions, others offer regular courses.

The lack of confidence of the labour unions in the efforts made by the institutions of higher learning towards solving labour relations problems has some basis. The workers fear, often with cause, that these institutions are in one way or another under the control of the employers.

It is known that many schools represent the workers' movement as a monopoly to be repressed and teach efficient methods of fighting unions.

To this subject that might be called union counter-education, should be added the campaigns that are carried on by some associations such as the National Association of Manufacturers and the Chamber of Commerce, which distribute free in the schools, pamphlets and films to help the teachers to better condemn the labour unions. How many school-books on economic and social questions insinuate maliciously glaring errors about the labour movement and its various activities !

And yet again, how many employers organize what they call "industry-education days", where they try to demonstrate to the teachers and pupils the benefits of scientific organization of labour in which the labour unions have no place.

Finally, worthy of mention, is the fact that in each American State, without exception, the teachers are practically forced to belong to the state education association, which is equivalent to a Company union.

These are so many dishonest ways of trying to establish control of ideas in a country where democracy is preached so much. These are

so many forces with which the education of labour must compete in the United States.

The Participation of the Catholic Church

In relation to the work of education of labour mentioned up to here, must be emphasized the efforts of the Catholic Church to instill into the workers the principles of its social doctrine and to have in union circles an influence by way of certain leaders that it may reach and train in its school.

There exists two principal school systems for union workers. Firstly, a night-school system under the jurisdiction of the parish and the diocese, for example at Detroit, New York, Hartford, Baltimore. What is taught is rather an initiation to the social doctrine of the Church, without any technical aspect. Some of these night schools are federated under the name of Association of Catholic Trade Unionists (A.C.T.U.) which possess its own weekly newspaper. This association has as aim to supplement the lack of doctrinal formation of the labour unions and warn the Catholic workers against the negative effects of being neutral on religious questions.

But the A.C.T.U. does not seem to have the influence that it would need to do efficient work. Other schools have never wished to join the association. For example, the local of the A.C.T.U. at Chicago changed itself into an independent group under the name of Catholic Labor Alliance, and has seen the number of its members increase since then. It has its own newspaper and holds weekly study groups and gives monthly talks all over the city.

Independent labour schools may be found, for example, at Philadelphia, St. Louis, New York, most of them under the direction of the Jesuit Fathers. The one at New York, the "Xavier Institute of Industrial Relations", offers a series of courses two evenings a week.

This is to some extent the activity of the Catholic organizations in the field of education of labour.
